

No Increase in VA Mental Health Services Demand after September 11

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers found no increase in use of mental health services among VA patients with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other mental illnesses in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This lack of increased mental health service use held true both in cities most affected by the attack, including New York City and Washington, D.C. and in cities where no attacks had taken place. The researchers had expected to see increased VA service use especially by patients with PTSD, which is brought on by exposure to overwhelming traumatic events, such as life-threatening violence in combat. Previous research has shown that military veterans are prone to re-activation of PTSD when exposed to subsequent trauma. Psychological distress following the terrorist attacks has been found to be widespread, even among Americans whose exposure was limited to televised images of death and destruction. A community survey of New York City residents conducted during the second month after the attacks found elevated evidence for PTSD symptoms, especially for those who were at the World Trade Center. In addition, a national survey that focused on communities not directly attacked found evidence of substantial symptoms of stress in 44% of adults and 35% of children 3-5 days after September 11. The researchers, Robert Rosenheck and Alan Fontana conclude that veterans were able to cope with the post-September 11 stress successfully enough that they did not seek increased professional assistance.